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SOME LACUNAE IN DEMOGRAPHIC DATA COLLECTION IN SOUTH ASIA WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO INDIA

by

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ABSTRACT

The demographic data collected in the South Asian countries have lacunae. Some of these are pointed out based on the experience of the author with Indian data. Sample surveys with questionnaires appropriate to the cultural context of these countries are suggested as a way out.

KEYWORDS: Demographic Data Collection, South Asia, India.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Demographic data collection in South Asia has made significant progress in the last several decades. Besides censuses, many innovative approaches have been employed to gather data in this region. India has taken a lead in this respect. The Chandrasekaran - Deming technique, first experimented in India, has been applied to estimation of vital rates in Bangladesh and Pakistan. This technique has found applications in other parts of the world as well. The sample registration scheme (SRS), a successor to the Chandrasekaran-Deming procedure, is being extensively used in India now for estimating the vital rates. The SRS is not without limitations and critics. But it does still provide useful information for population studies. There are several private, quasi-governmental, and governmental agencies in India (e.g. NCAER, NSS, ISI, Population Research Centers) that conduct socio-economic and demographic surveys on a regular basis. Besides many university researchers have collected valuable demographic data. The Indian census questionnaires have undergone several changes in the last decades and the draft slip of the 1991 census seems to come up with some questions useful in migration studies.

Let us look at the other countries in this region. This session, it is sad to note, has invited papers only on India,

Nepal, and Sri Lanka. The omission of Bangladesh and Pakistan, where exciting data collection efforts are going on, has to be offset by contributed papers on these countriers. One would like to see a paper on the Maldives too in this session. An attempt has been made here to list all the possible types of demographic data sources for Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. This is shown in the appendix to this paper. This listing is by no means complete and comprehensive.

In Bangladesh, the ICDDR,B has been involved in demographic surveillance experimentation. The Contraceptive Prevalence Surveys and various other ad hoc studies have been conducted by private, or government research outfits. A successor to the WFS (BFS), one is told, is being developed for being launched in the coming year. Most of the private sector research is funded by international funding.

Pakistan has been involved in various surveys (PGE being one of them) to update her data available from the censuses. The labour force surveys have helped the researchers with data on the activity rates of the Pakistanis.

2. DATA DEFICIENCIES

Even though there have been many attempts to collect data on many aspects of the demography of these countries, there are several lacunae in the data gathered that render detailed analyses of demographic behaviors often difficult, if not

impossible. We all know that a good demographic analysis calls for a study of the determinants of the various phenomena and discuss their consequences. The aim of this paper is to point out where these deficiencies are. These lacunae are present in the data collected in all the countries of this region, even though the discussions here are based on this author's experience with the data for India. The areas where the deficiencies are felt are in differential mortality, differential fertility, marriage and remarriage, migration and social mobility and labour force. We shall look at each of these areas broadly to throw light on the types of deficiencies and how they can be remedied.

3. DIFFERENTIAL MORTALITY

This writer was working on mortality decline in Kerala from a historical perspective. The objective of the study was to see to what extent the introduction of cassava into the State was responsible for the decline. Kerala's mortality, we know, is the lowest in India and it has been so for the last several decades. There are a few distinct features of the force of mortality in Kerala. The life expectancy at birth is near the 70 years mark now with the females having a good edge over the males. See Panikar and Soman (1984) for details on the health status of Keralites. The female superiority in regard to mortality has been so from the beginning of this century, even when the life expectancy at birth was around the 30 years mark. See Kurup (1979) for life expectancy estimates for the various census periods. There are no micro level data on the correlates

of mortality to explain this phenomenon. This author's attempt to build a sociological theory to account for the differential has been partially hampered by data deficiencies on the social and nutritional characteristics of the people.

There is another aspect to the differential mortality that needs to be discussed. In the cassava impact study (Krishnan, 1987), the author was interested to look at the social class differentials. We have no information on mortality by social class (or its proxies: education, income, occupation), or caste (something that is dropped now from the census, or the registration questionnaires), or religion, or nutritional status. An attempt has been made by the Kerala Bureau of Economics and Statistics (see Nair, 1979) to present the life expectancies for the various regions of Kerala. To explain the regional differentials, more information on the socio-cultural and structural aspects of the population is needed, both at the micro and the macro levels. The micro level data will help in classifying the population into social classes. Then the mortality and the health data can be integrated. Nair does not do this in view of paucity of such data. This writer was unable to test his hypothesis that the poorer section of Kerala's population benefitted from the use of cassava in combating mortality.

Historical data may not be available. But information on social class (or its proxy-education/income/ocupation/or even caste) should be collected through the SRS, or sample surveys for all the Indian States to study the impact of development on

mortality. This applies not only to India but also to the other countries in this region.

4. DIFFERENTIAL FERTILITY

The state of affairs is not that bad with respect to fertility and differential fertility in this region. But more needs to be achieved. The various projects on fertility have collected useful facts on the respondents facilitating an analysis of differential fertility. But surveys in the WFS series for Bangladesh, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka have not been able to deliver a proper understanding of the dynamics of fertility in these countries. The questionnaires used in the WFS have a western bias, even though each country had added some specific questions of her own. The data collected are neither fully realistic nor fully relevant to these cultures. Some of the studies done in India fare better. See Mahadevan and Sumangala (1987) on Kerala and Mahadevan (1979) on Tamil Nadu. The demographers of this region have to develop new perspectives, indigenous to the scene, and collect quality data to study the determinants of fertility. Such studies are essential for each State in India in view of their diversity and for various ethnic and cultural groups in all these countries. Language is an important indicator of culture. Linguistic aspects of all demographic processes are a neglected area in South Asian demography.

It will be worthwhile to set up a detailed questionnaire on fertility with sociological insights, appropriate to the culture,

into the process and administer it to a sample of men and women (1 in a 100,000, or so) at the time of the census. For a periodical monitoring, regular sample surveys are needed. Even indepth anthropological type studies, though based on a small sample, will do a good job in gaining an understanding of the fertility process.

This author has not seen a good study of the determinants of the fertility differentials among the various religious groups or language groups in India since Davis' (1951) classic work. Micro level data are needed to do this.

5. MARRIAGE AND REMARRIAGE

The censuses form the main source of information on marriage. Agarwala's (1962) study on age at marriage in India is based on the census statistics. Only the "age at marriage" datum is collected for ever married women (see the 1991 Indian Census (draft) slip). What about men? What about the age at remarriage, if the order of marriage is over one? We need to know the marriage history -- the age at first marriage, duration of first marriage, age at divorce/widowhood, duration of divorce/widowhood, age at remarriage etc. The marriage and the fertility histories have to be interlaced. The census data cannot help in getting a good picture of the marriage history. Marriage is still an important social institution in this region. Fertility is socially permitted only within marriage and hence, for a proper understanding of fertility, detailed marriage history data are required. Either the census should have a

detailed questionnaire on marriage history administered to a sample of respondents at the time of census operations, or a sample survey has to be undertaken. In India, the SRS can be extended in scope to cover registration of marriages/remarriages/divorces/widowhoods.

6. MIGRATION AND SOCIAL MOBILITY

All the countries in South Asia depend mostly on the censuses for migration data. Some local studies on the determinants of migration are available. Many classic studies on migration are based on census data (Bose, 1980; Davis, 1951; Kosinski and Elahi, 1985; Krishnan and Rowe, 1978; Zachariah, 1964, 1968). But these studies do not tell us the whole story of migration. Various rounds of the NSS do gather data on internal migration in India. These also are limited in scope. The 1961 census of India offered some additional information on migration (e.g. duration of residence at destination). But duration of residence at origin is equally important. Also we do not have facts on the determinants of migration. The characteristics of the persons before, at the time of and after migration are relevant for an understanding of the migratory behavior of people. The 1991 census of India draft slip asks for information on last residence. Duration of stay at destination is collected but the one at origin is not. Even the "noted reasons" for migration in the slip are too vague. Instead of these questions for all members of the population, which will be of marginal utility to analysts and policy makers and a burden to the respondents, it is

better to administer a detailed migration history questionnaire, comprising of reasons for migration at each stage in the movement process, social characteristics at the time of and after the move etc. to a sample of respondents.

The state of affairs is the same when we wish to study social, vertical, or occupational mobility. This author had to make some strong assumptions to examine occupational mobility in India (Krishnan, 1975). Information on occupational history along with life cycle changes, details on educational achievements, parental background, spatial movements etc. are needed to do an analytical study of social mobility. As indicated before, specialized data collection has to be carried out on a sample of respondents, either at the time of the census taking or through specialized surveys, to fill in this lacuna. It is better to keep the census slip short and confine the detailed enquiry to a sample of the people.

7. LABOUR FORCE

Labour force data are mostly derived at the time of the census. Pakistan, of course, has had labour force surveys to supplement the censuses. All these countries have adopted the "activity", or "labour force" approach, a practice followed in the western countries. India which used the "dependency" or "gainful occupation" approach till 1951, switched over to the "labour force" approach in 1961. But in 1961 and 1971, a dual approach was employed (India, 1974, pp. 94-95). Nepal seems to have done the same thing (United Nations, 1980, p. 122). It

seems to this writer that the labour force data obtained through the "activity" methodology are not realistic for these countries, which are mainly agricultural, in spite of remarkable progress in the industrial and the tertiary sectors of the economies.

These countries are heavily dependent on agriculture. Women do contribute to the agrarian sector of the economy. But a look at the labour force data does not bring out this at all. The labour force participation of women was 4.0% in 1974 in Bangladesh (Huq, 1978), 11.9% in 1971 in India (Krishnan, 1977), and 4.3% in 1978 in Pakistan (Krishnan, 1982). These figures seem to be out of touch with reality. The application of concepts relevant to the industrially advanced countries to developing countries dependent on agriculture, in the name of international comparability, may not be meaningful. See Mitra (1965) and Miura (1965) for some insights into this area. Even for the developed countries, the labour force analysis needs new approaches (Krishnan and Associates 1981, 1982; Smith, 1988). This writer is convinced that the South Asian countries should give high priority to develop a proper approach to measuring the labour force. The 1991 census of Indian draft questionnaire has not well brought out the appropriate dimensions of the labour force -- e.g. how will the "major part of the year" be defined? Even if labour force surveys are planned, or carried out, the definitional aspects are to be well thought out and be relevant to the particular economy.

8. CONCLUSION

It has been shown here that the present data gathering systems utilized in India and other South Asian countries do not provide the population researchers with full details for examining the dynamics of fertility, mortality, marriage, migration and labour force. Either very specialized surveys have to be undertaken with questionnaires appropriate to the cultural context of these countries, or such questionnaires have to be administered to a sample of the population at the time of the census operations. Since the countries need to monitor their social situation, sample surveys have to be carried out on a regular basis. It seems that properly developed sample surveys, from design and questionnaire points of view, with well trained staff are the best means to fill in the lacunae in demographic data in South Asia.

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APPENDIX

Demographic Data Sources

BANGLADESH	Censuses of British India (Bengal in particular)
	Censuses of East Pakistan PGE study
	Censuses of Bangladesh Postenumeration Survey
	Retrospective fertility and mortality survey
	ICDDR,B studies
	BID studies
	NIPORT Reports
	WFS (BFS)
	CPS
	Various private sector and university projects
	ACPR Oral Contraceptives Study
INDIA	Censuses of British India
	Censuses of India
	U.N. Mysore Population Study
	N.S.S. Reports
	ISI Surveys (Other than NSS)
	Sample Registration System
	NCAER Surveys
	U.N. Supported projects in Mysore, U.P. etc.
	Planning Commission Research Program Projects
	Varous city surveys
	Nutrition Studies (ICMR supported)
	Gokhale Institute Surveys
	Population Research

Appendix (cont'd)

	Center Surveys (e.g. Mangadu, Dharwar, Lucknow, Delhi)
	IIM Studies
	University Projects
PAKISTAN	Censuses of British India
	Censuses of Pakistan
	PGE study
	Labour force surveys
	WFS (PFS)
	Vital registration in the rural and the urban areas
	National impact surveys
NEPAL	Censuses of Nepal
	WFS (NFS)
SRI LANKA	Censuses of Ceylon/Sri Lanka
	Vital registration
	WFS (SFS)
	Postenumeration survey of 1953
	Studies of underregistration of births and deaths in Ceylon in 1970
	Caldwell's (ANU) project on fertility
	Various university projects